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AN EPISODE

IN THE

HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

BY

REV. CHARLES VOYSEY.

VICAR OF HEALAUGH.



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A LECTURE delivered at ST. GEORGE'S HALL,
LONDON, on Sunday the 19th March, 1871,
Entitled—

“AN EPISODE

IN THE

HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.”

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN—

I CANNOT appear before this audience in the capacity of a Lecturer, without first asking their indulgence, in consideration of the circumstances in which I am just now placed.

Within the last three weeks, since I accepted the kind invitation of the Committee of the Sunday League to address you this evening, my head has been made dizzy by the multiplicity of duties, and my pen has scarcely had any rest from its usual enormous correspondence.

I have had literally no leisure in which to prepare and properly to arrange the topics on which I purpose to speak. There has not been time to collect the many interesting illustrations of my subject which lie scattered far and wide in the various Christian communities all over the world. To write a treatise at all worthy of the subject of religious liberty in the nineteenth century, it would have been necessary to examine the evidence afforded to us by the history of the close of the eighteenth century as to where our starting point was in the nineteenth. One would have also to trace

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the course of public opinion, not only in our own country, but all over the civilized world, as it expressed itself through the press, through controversial writings, through popular agitation, and through acts of Parliament. One would have to distinguish the individuals whose words have had the greatest effect in stirring up public attention, and in forwarding the cause of religious liberty. Instances of failure would have to be noticed, and the causes of failure clearly indicated; above all, every case of religious persecution would have to be enumerated and classified, and from the facts thus presented to the mind, the hidden laws which have been all this time regulating the ebb and flow of the tide of religious liberty would have to be brought clearly into view.

This slight sketch of what such an essay ought to be does not cover nearly all the ground which it ought to cover, but this is enough, I trust, to show you that I do not come before you under false pretences; that I do not in the least degree under estimate the immense proportions of such a work; and that it would have been impossible for me, with my recent manifold engagements and domestic anxieties, to have attempted to arrange and then to condense the various subjects which essentially belong to a review of this most important part of the history of our own times.

In default of this, I must ask you to accept from me to-night a brief account of my own experience as an advocate of religious liberty, and as one who has had to pay much—and may have to pay much more—as the penalty for his attack against authority in matters of religion.

There is so much in the mere dry facts of my own history in the last twenty years, to throw light upon the subject before us, that I cannot do better than recount some of the most important events which I have witnessed, or in which I have myself taken an active part.

I make no apology for introducing somewhat personal matters. For religious liberty is a matter which is either personal or nothing at all. Liberty for the individual is the only true liberty. Moreover—and it is well worth noticing—we generally get all the liberty we deserve. It is a man's own fault in many cases (I do not say in all), if his religious liberty is restrained. If, then, I give you some account of my own struggles for liberty, of my failures as well as of my successes, it may be even more useful to you than that wonderful essay which I spoke of as a book that ought to be written.

Just a quarter of a century ago, I was a sincere and hearty believer in the evangelical doctrines. I had been "converted," as the phrase is, and set my heart on being a preacher of the gospel. Having no other means to secure my object, except that of a strong will and inflexibility of purpose, I sought and obtained the assistance of a society which provided funds for the support at Oxford and Cambridge of young men exactly of my views, and possessing the same earnest desire to enter the ministry. The scrutiny was beyond description severe. Pages and pages of letter-paper had to be covered with answers to questions searching deeply, not only into one's views of religious doctrine, but into those religious feelings and emotions which for humanity's sake ought to be held sacred. This done, the candidate was handed over to eight clergymen in succession, who privately examined him with still greater minuteness; and looking back upon it all now, I am simply amazed that they, the Committee, ever found a candidate bold enough to face such an ordeal.

I matriculated at Oxford in 1847. Once started on the career, one would have thought the poor candidate might be left to the reports of his college tutor, or of some clerical keeper. But no, he had to write every three months to one of the secretaries, to give an ac-

count of his work, of the books he had read, and of the progress he was making at college. This was but fair, seeing the society was paying its money to get the young man educated ; but the rules required that he should also give the secretaries an account, so far as it was discoverable, of his spiritual state, of the growth of his soul, of his fervency in devotion, and all the rest of the nauseating twaddle with which the Tract Society's publications abound.

Fervent as I then was, and not ashamed to tell the truth, even about myself, I must say this scrutiny was odious to me from the very first. My inmost heart rebelled against laying before a Committee what might have passed between me and my Maker in the most solemn hours of retirement and aspiration. I cannot remember how I got through those first awful quarterly reports, whether I was too grieved and insulted to be open with them or not. At all events I tried to be good, and to take it up as a cross ; but from that hour, my friends, I call you to witness, from that hour I began to rebel against my religious bondage, and to plot for religious liberty. The inquisitorial means which had been devised on purpose to keep our souls in bondage, proved fatal to the end in view, and excited a rebellion against authority in religion, which has ended in a freedom for which I now publicly thank that Society, that Committee, and those Secretaries. I owe to their mistaken zeal my utter emancipation from the bondage of their creed, and from the tyranny of religious authority in any shape.

I will not tell you how, link by link, the old shackles fell off ; I will not enumerate the varying and ever widening differences of doctrine which it was my great privilege to listen to in the lecture rooms and in the university pulpit. There was a set of men in Oxford at that time who thought it low ("slow" was the correct term) to go to Church. I, however, did not care for their opinion, but invariably went, and well have I

been rewarded; for I was indelibly taught there to remember that in the Church of England a man might preach any doctrine he liked, and find some shelter for it under the Thirty-nine Articles. I wish I could only give you a dozen extracts, with the names of a dozen preachers, just to enable you to form some idea of the beautiful Babel it was. But it was a grand school for the mind, and I loved its lessons too well ever to absent myself from the university pulpit, unless the preacher (whose name was always previously announced) was a known incompetent.

Now those were the palmy days of religious liberty in the Church of England. There had been Bampton Lectures, all but flatly contradicting the doctrine of the Trinity; there were others explaining away the bodily resurrection; sermons openly ridiculing justification by faith, and superseding the doctrine of atonement altogether, by unvarnished "salvation by works." One eminent and accomplished preacher, afterwards raised to the Episcopal bench, in his first university sermon, frightened and shocked all the Evangelicals throughout the University, by declaring, in so many words, that the human heart was not utterly depraved by nature, not gone as far as possible from original righteousness. Let him repeat this to-day, and he would be liable to prosecution. Then of course we had the usual varieties of Roman Catholic doctrine, in open antagonism to the Thirty-nine Articles. It was a delightful time, I say, and Oxford was a most eminently proper place to send young men to, who were to be trained—not exactly to become evangelical ministers, but—to be searchers after truth, champions of liberty, and disciples of common sense.

The training bore its fruit; the quarterly piety-letters began to be cold, unsatisfactory, and at last wicked; for, to use the words of one of the secretaries, "the letters did not even name the name of our blessed Lord." The candidate must be summoned—what could be the matter? He was getting worldly. He was less

devoted than he was. He was forsaking the simplicity (*i.e.*, the stupidity) of what this clerical Committee called "the Gospel." He must be called up and examined. Yes, all this was done, and the candidate for holy orders, still trusting in candour, in spite of all that had been done to make him a hypocrite, openly admits that his belief in the creed of his youth was gone, and nothing left him but a most sure and happy reliance on the perfect goodness of God, and on His goodwill to all men. He is no longer a Christian, in their sense of the word, but a Theist, and he owns it to his ruin. The poor Committee men can do nothing else. They quietly strike his name off their books, and send him into the street—helpless, penniless, and within a year of his degree. They were perfectly right, perfectly consistent. The so-called "true believer" could not do otherwise, *i.e.*, if he were "true believer" more than he was a man.

But among the true believers of that day, there was one who was "man" first, and "true believer" second—who with his firm, unwavering, most conscientious, and extreme Calvinism, was a true "man" at heart, was intensely rich in all that is most beautiful in human nature, whose sympathies were tender as a woman's, whose gentleness of heart and hand won for him the admiration of his bitterest theological adversary, and the love and gratitude of every one who was privileged to be near him or under his care. This most beloved man, whose name I shall never cease to bless, the only one whom I shall name in this connection, was the Rev. John Hill, Vice-Principal of St Edmund Hall, Oxford. He stood between me and ruin at that trying hour. There was another with me in trouble—we wrote and told what had happened, and with almost breaking hearts bid our tutor farewell. The next post brought a most affectionate letter from him—not a word of reproach in it—summoning us at once to Oxford, where, on our arrival, the dear old saint, scarcely able

to speak for emotion, embraced us as his sons, and said he would now be father to us, and be responsible for all our college and university expenses till we could get our degrees.

You must not be impatient with these personal recitals, they bear most forcibly on the question before us as to the state of Religious Liberty in those days.

Mr Hill was unswerving in his own belief, and it would be treason to his blessed memory to imply that he did not think my intellectual state a very wrong and dangerous one. He differed chiefly, if not only, from those with whom he was associated, in setting a higher value than they did on integrity of purpose and blamelessness of life. He considered that, being steady, regular in college duties, and obedient to college discipline, combined with having a deep and undiminished interest in religion, were, to a certain extent, pledges that the future lesson would be upright and pleasing to God, in spite of tremendously heretical notions which might wear off; while I have no doubt his own tender heart and wide experience had taught him that God had his chosen ones everywhere and in every phase of belief and unbelief. At all events, I obtained my degree through his great bounty, and subsequently my college testimonials, on which I was ordained in York-Minster by Dr Musgrave, Archbishop of York in 1852.

Another, my companion in trouble, whose views had gone further in expression than my own, could not obtain the college testimonials, but Mr Hill finding himself unable conscientiously to sign them, actually wrote to Archbishop Musgrave, recommending the person to whom I allude, for ordination, and was supported in the same recommendation by one who is now a prelate of our church. I must, you will admit, avoid naming every person implicated in this matter for the sake of survivors and friends.

What does all this show, but the plain fact that,

about twenty years ago, men earnest enough in their own religious belief were far more tolerant in their practice towards unbelievers than you will find them now?

I have often been asked, why I took orders in the Church of England, holding such views as I did? The true answer to this is, that at that time there was never any question as to whether I should do so or not. It was taken for granted by my own mother, whose piety was above question, by many truly religious people, by a most highly cultivated and pious woman—my godmother, and even my dear old tutor who helped me to get my degree on purpose that I might enter the ministry of the Church of England. No objection was raised either before or at the time of my ordination. I had also become quite used to signing the Articles, and twenty years ago, I assure you, they were signed almost universally with such an utterly immoral disregard of their contents, that no one ever troubled himself about the question of conscience at all. Besides this, every Bishop in the land had been trained to take such a comprehensive view of them in spite of the rigid terms in which subscription was then actually made, that their chief function seemed to be to calm the minds of candidates for holy orders, with the assurance that the fetters would hang very lightly and were warranted not to gall. Were I to wander into the region of illustration, I might give you shoals of examples of men either confirmed Romanists, or confirmed sceptics, signing the Thirty-nine Articles with equal facility, and as a matter of mere form, and receiving holy orders in the National Church. Of course, this was all very wrong, and acknowledged to be so by every one who gave it a thought, but the custom had continued for more than three centuries, and only very few men would look at it in the face; and we were broken into it when quite lads at our first entry into college life, so that it is small blame to any one of us

that we should have fallen into moral obliquity on this point under such surroundings.

Now, mark what occurred, though it is to me most extraordinary that it has not been more noticed. In the course of time, the immorality of these perpetual subscriptions to articles became duly recognised, and by the common consent of the Church and country, the form of subscription was altered five or six years ago, so as to leave the smallest possible amount of obligation to concur with the Articles, and to enable almost any one to sign the new form in perfectly good faith. A clergyman has now only to agree to use the Prayer Book as by law established (and therefore as capable of revision at any time by the Legislature), and to assent to "the doctrine" of the Church of England, and that it agrees with Scripture. Now, since no definition has been laid down as to what the doctrine of the Church is, it is legally open to any one to pick and choose among all the incoherent and contradictory doctrines of the Church, what the real doctrine is ; one will say, the Deity of Jesus is the doctrine ; another, the dogma of the Trinity ; another, the atonement ; another, the supremacy and infallibility of the Scriptures ; another, the sacramental theory, and another will say, "the doctrine" of the Church of England is, that "there is only one living and true God," viz., the Creator of the world and Father of men.

There is the patent fact, however. When the immorality of the old subscription was fairly discovered, it led to a change in the law—to such a change, indeed, as reduces subscription to any particular doctrine to a pure farce. Subscription now means nothing at all. But this definite act of the Legislature, I want you to observe, was nothing more nor less than the public and authoritative statement of the prevailing sentiment that subscription itself was an odious sham, and ought to be abolished along with Test Acts and other follies. But any one studying the course of religious liberty in

this part of the 19th century will see that the change came just too late to do any good in checking bigotry or in silencing accusation. At the time when I was at Oxford, religious opinion had already begun to take more definite shape. The party represented by Dr Pusey inaugurated a new era in the history of dogma. The Church had been previously very sleepy, and mumbled about "our holy religion," and submission to authority, and said a good many tame things about good works. Then the Evangelicals sprang up and made religion a matter of individual necessity, and were contented only to see their members frequently on their knees, or with a Bible in their hands. Their sermons would soon teach them the proper Shibboleths. But when the Tractarian movement followed, its first tendency was to sharpen men's thoughts about religious opinion, and to petrify that opinion into dogma. Thus each party served to mould each other into shape. What one believed the other contradicted, and *vice versa* ; but, as they grew, both sections of the Church cared more and more for *doctrine* ; less and less (as sections) for *religion*. Their mutual antagonism only served to sharpen the points of difference, and to whet the weapons of controversy. Religious liberty has not gained one single direct advantage from the separate or combined action of those two great bodies. How could it, when the object of each has alike been to arrest the minds of men, and to enslave them, to cripple their native manliness by terror, to coerce them into subjection of their reason and their moral sense, one to the Bible, the other to the Church.

Indirectly, of course, every movement has done good, because good, and good only, is God's purpose, and its coming is surer than the morrow's sun. The very efforts to cripple liberty, only stimulate the enslaved to rebel ; and so the dogmatists of High and Low Church naturally, by re-action, gave birth to a brood of sceptics, of which, I thank God, I am one, and not the least

active among the number; and at this moment I am not likely to forget those influences to which I owe the awakening of my reasoning faculties, and my happy position now as a perfectly unfettered speaker.

The intensification of dogma by the conflict of these two irreconcilable parties in the Church, was soon followed by the rise of another school—a party which cannot properly be called a school of opinion, because it embraced many men of various degrees of divergence in opinion. They differed more or less from both High and Low Church opinions, and differed among themselves still more. Their common bond consisted in their common disagreement with the other two parties from which they had all deserted, but in not much else. They were mostly men whose antagonism to the High or Low Church doctrines, or to both combined, was entirely due to the distinctness into which those doctrines had lately been formulated. Doctrines of atonement, or of sacramental grace, had begun to be expressed with an odious exactness, from which moral instinct or common sense promptly revolted; and the immediate result of the increased definiteness of dogma was to drive away into an irreconcilable hostility some of the most learned, most earnest, and most devout of the clergy. Some abandoned the Church of England at once for that of Rome, knowing that the principles of the two dominant parties were hopelessly antagonistic to each other. Others leaned towards a qualified Rationalism, which expressed itself either in the investigation of the claims of the Bible as a revelation, or in dry criticism and exegesis; while others openly, and without any penal consequences, spirited away all meaning from the dogmatic formularies, deprived the atonement of its forensic character, reduced the sacrament of baptism to a mere ceremony like coronation, and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to a club dinner. One eminent thinker, afterwards an archbishop, rejected the Athanasian dogma of the Trinity, and, defiant of all his-

torical warning, proclaimed as his belief what was nothing less than rank Sabellianism. Time would fail me to enumerate all the heresies which sprang up at the trumpet blast of resuscitated dogma. Suffice it to say, that the rebels against it had fought the battle well over in their own studies, and saw that there were two great strongholds which would have to be taken and dismantled, if any progress in truth or liberty was to be achieved. These were the authorities by which Dogma was sanctioned, and the foundation on which the superstructure was built. In plain English, the Bible and the Church on one hand, and the dogma of eternal torments on the other.

It was plain enough that, as regards the first, if the Bible could be in any way undermined, or its authority successfully disputed, all dogmas resting upon it must fall with it. Study and criticism would eventually destroy that authority; and accordingly many a faithful inquirer set to work with all his might to prove first the human origin of the Book from a critical study of its history, and then to expose its manifold and palpable contradictions, errors, and immoralities. Another army of assailants devoted themselves to upset obnoxious dogmas, by attacking the one great dogma on which all the rest were built. A shrewd Bishop, who had once been a Lawyer, said to me, "If you take away the doctrine of endless punishment, you take away all need of an atonement; if you take away the atonement, you take away all need of a Divine Saviour, and the very Deity of our Lord becomes imperilled."

My answer was characteristic—"My Lord, I cannot help that; I only know that the doctrine of endless punishment is wickedly false and blasphemous against God, and my duty is to say so wherever it may lead, whatever be the consequence." This was just ten years ago, and I think I am justified in looking back with a little honest pride at the work which has been done in this country alone, not to speak of other lands,

in undermining and destroying a dogma so perfectly abhorrent to our hearts and consciences, and so shamefully dishonouring to God. All around us there is scarcely a single sect of Christians who has not produced a heretic or two on this subject. I believe every religious community in the land, unless it be the Wesleyans, has had its one or more black sheep who has been bold enough to disown and to disprove either on moral grounds, or from the Bible itself, the dogma of endless punishment. Still the leaders in this attack have been far from united on other points. Some would go so far and no farther. Their little spark of scepticism and heroism seems to have burned itself out in this one tremendous flash ; all the rest of the orthodox dogmas they retain as before. Never troubled with doubt as to the authority of the Bible or the Church, the deserters from Low or High Church ranks contented themselves with exerting redoubled energy in maintaining some form or another of old dogma. They said they believed in the atonement, while they gave to the word a new meaning, and to the whole process of reconciliation a new form, so entirely original and so utterly unlike the regular Pauline evangelical version of it as to be scarcely recognised, nor would it have been recognised at all, or suffered to gain ground as it did, unless the teachers of it had carefully adopted much of the old language about it which gave them the air of real believers, notwithstanding the old sense of that language, was by them absolutely forsworn. This, too, spread among the orthodox nonconformists, and has become an epidemic among them. A remarkable movement among the High Church clergy in the endeavour to set up the authority of the Church over that of the Bible (in direct violation of the Thirty-nine Articles by the way), helped very much to encourage the criticism of the Bible. While honest students were doing this work of criticism, and nothing else, many of the High Church

party gave their sanction and accepted their conclusions, just as those who were undermining Church authority and the value of tradition, were flattered and praised by the Low Church party. The object of each being to weaken the position and forces of the other party. So you will find among the Broad Church School, some who are claimed by the High, and others who are claimed by the Low Church party, as open allies. Things could not, however, remain long in this position ; the hunger and thirst after truth was not to be so easily appeased. Really honest and brave inquirers were thankful enough to adopt all sound conclusions whatsoever, by whomsoever they had been demonstrated. They accepted with equal thankfulness destructive criticism of the Bible, and destructive criticism of the Church's claims. They were not content with the petty triumphs of mere party warfare, but they must fight if needs be against foes on both sides. The Evangelical and the Sacramentalist, the Bibliolater and the Sacerdotalist had been playing into his hands by exposing the weak points in each other's armour, and now it was the sceptic's turn to use his knowledge to some effect. He trampled alike on the exploded fancy of an Infallible Book, and on the insolent assumption of an Infallible Church. With this double scorn he clears the atmosphere of the choking dusty dogmas which had so long overpowered his reason, his conscience, and his heart. If dogmas are good or necessary, he will, at all events, make them for himself, or pick and choose which he will have out of the confused mass at his feet. He will no longer be dictated to by his fellow-men as to what he shall or shall not believe on a subject on which his heart tells him that not only he has a perfect right to frame his own creed, but that he is bound to do so. He feels that it is his first duty to his Maker, to exercise that right on his very entrance into manhood if he can, and as soon after as may be possible to him.

It was not likely that so formidable an enemy to dogmatic authority, should be suffered to enter the citadel unobserved, or to fight unresisted.

The usual weapons of orthodoxy were brought out again and used with no little energy, if not with much skill or effect. Ill-names, of course, reproaches, false charges, misrepresentations, all that an angry heart could force a bitter tongue to say, was said in infinite variety of invective in order to punish the honest thinker for his honest thought, or to deter by intimidation others who were beginning to tread the dangerous ground of inquiry. All this, and much more of deep and downright injury has been inflicted by the orthodox upon the heretic, by the genuine dogmatist upon all those who venture to think for themselves. But I must not linger over these well known and proverbial facts. I only allude to them to show how perfectly futile has been all this frantic outcry and malicious accusation. Have not the prosecutors and literary revilers of the authors of "*Essays and Reviews*," of Bishop Colenso, and of every other whose name is honoured by these reproaches, have not, I ask, these prosecutors and persecutors both within and without convocation done their own cause unspeakable and irreparable damage? Have they not published far and wide, even into remotest lands, the views which they ought in all self-safety and prudence to have ignored? Have they not by every vilifying epithet or severe measure alienated a thousand hearts from themselves, and from the Church and Bible, which they are trying to make acceptable? Have they not shown by their feeble books, their Bampton Lectures, their "*Aids to Faith*," and their sanctimonious little tracts, what a poor forlorn case they are defending? Have they ventured on fairly tackling the main arguments of any one of the heretical works they denounce? Have they not studiously avoided this dangerous and suicidal task, and only put forth a long and trembling arm to snatch from

their foe, here a lock of hair, or there a bit of loose raiment, and then danced over the prize as if it had been the warrior's head? To gibbet some infinitesimal blunder in arithmetic, or history, or philology has set these orthodox controversialists in a perfect ecstasy of triumph, in which all the old orthodox ladies around them wave their handkerchiefs and shake their fans, vainly thinking that, like their own theological system, if one little bolt be drawn, the fabric of heresy will all fall to pieces—forgetting that to discover an error or two in a sceptical work will not render either the Bible or the Church again infallible, or enable reasoning and devout men to see the justice of endless torments, the morality of the atonement, or the reasonableness of the doctrine of the Trinity. While they were wasting all their energies in crying, "Turn him out," they forgot that neither the heretic nor themselves could unsay what he had said. The murder was out, the people—too often called the "ignorant mob"—an "untutored audience"—the people, I say, had heard the words, and knew the speaker; they knew pretty well, too, what it must have cost him to tell them the plain truth—to proclaim his own honest convictions, true or false, if those convictions were but unorthodox. The people had often had glimmerings of the same light in their own hearts—some of them had lived long, secretly rejoicing in that light, and they were glad that the speaker had said it not only for his own sake, but for the sake of hundreds whom their own voices could not reach.

But, in spite of all opposition, the clergy of the Church of England have for some years enjoyed comparative liberty—liberty which has never been exceeded, if it has ever been equalled, in any other religious body or in any previous age.

Although the *Essays and Reviews* was, in some respects, a disappointing book, with the exception of one essay, suggesting so much more than it plainly affirmed, and to the minds of the most advanced think-

ers among the clergy not going half far enough; yet it fortunately became the point on which our subsequent liberties turned. The orthodox parties so contrived their prosecution that the two great dogmas already referred to were made the chief points in dispute. The Privy Council were called upon to state whether or not the Church of England required her clergy to say that the Bible was all true, or gave them leave to say that part of it was false; and also whether the clergy were required to teach the doctrine of endless punishment. These were, as you know, the two great strongholds of orthodoxy and the points on which there was the greatest anxiety. High and Low Churchmen joined in the prosecution, and both did so in order to secure a judgment which would leave the foundations of orthodoxy unmoved.

Lord Westbury's decision was a death-blow to their hopes. His judgment was equivalent to an admission that, whether the Bible was infallible or not, the Church did not hold the infallibility as a dogma; and that whether endless punishment were certain or not, the clergy were not obliged to teach it. We cannot forget how this celebrated judgment was received—how 11,000 clergymen, under the sanction of the two primates of England, protested against it, and re-affirmed their belief in an Infallible Bible and an Eternal Hell; how clearly the judgment was perceived to be fatal to the future integrity of the orthodox belief by all parties interested whether in its support or extinction. The attitude of the Bishops at the time boded ill for the liberty of all unbeneficed clergy, and this circumstance led to my own præferment as Incumbent of Healaugh in 1864. The new act of subscription followed soon upon Lord Westbury's judgment, and thus the ground was cleared for action by the united agency of the Privy Council and Parliament. To these two causes may be traced the appearance of the *Sling and the Stone*, because both the Court of Appeal and the

Legislature led me, among many others, to believe that the hard and fast lines of dogma were all but effaced, and that the day of religious liberty had begun to dawn upon the National Church. I may be allowed here to explain what *the Sling and Stone* was, and how it came to be published; for all these details throw light upon the subject we are now considering. All through my previous ministry I had steadfastly kept to this one rule: I never would say anything in the pulpit but what I then and there believed to be true. Hitherto I had for the most part affirmed my own beliefs without very prominently attacking what I believed to be error. I had thought it wise to be careful and reticent, and not to disturb, in any unseemly haste, the religious convictions of those whom I addressed. The plan answered well enough for the first ten or eleven years of my ministry, because the time was hardly ripe for more open attack. But I did not adopt that course through any timidity on my own account—simply and solely with the hope of doing good. I gained nothing personally by my reticence. I was everywhere suspected and accused of heresy, punished once severely by temporal ruin, and handed on from curacy to curacy, torn from many dear associates and works of usefulness—solely for not being sufficiently orthodox, and for omitting what were then deemed essential doctrines of Christianity.

I cannot say I was dismissed from my appointment in Jamaica, because I demanded and obtained my passage back to England; but theological opinion had much to do with my differences with the Bishop. From one curacy I was dismissed, only and solely because a fellow-curate, whose father was providing the stipend, had discovered my sympathy with Professor Jowett and the other writers in *Essays and Reviews*, while he confessed he could not find fault with my sermons. From another curacy I was dismissed for preaching a sermon against eternal torments—a sermon,

be it observed, with which my Incumbent admitted that he substantially agreed, but which he had not the—well, we will say the *audacity*, to have preached himself.

This was my last dismissal, for after that I obtained another curacy in the same diocese, strongly recommended by the Bishop himself. Thence I was preferred to Healaugh, and the rest you know.

The history of those changes, dismissals, and new appointments would be deeply interesting if time permitted me to recount it; but I must hasten on to the period when I became beneficed. I felt that the new position of safety and independence added still more to my responsibilities. I did not know how long I might live, or how soon I might be again moved. I would work with all my energy and earnestness in doing what I long foresaw would have to be done before an impression could be made on the bulwarks of superstition and religious slavery. Hundreds had been content like myself with simply teaching that two and two make four, although they knew that the people had been taught to think that two and two make five, and were duly trained to believe that both statements might be equally correct and were not radically at variance. Now I could not take that course. I must be as honest and as anxious to teach my parishioners the exact truth as to teach it to my own children. I must be as diligent in cultivating a thirst for liberty and truth in the pulpit as at home. I was still bound, and willingly bound, by that part of the ordination vow which Bishops and Privy Councillors so conveniently forget, “to preach only as necessary to salvation that which I myself was persuaded might be proved from the Bible.” I was still bound not to contradict the letter of the Thirty-nine Articles which had been shaken, though not removed, by recent decisions and legislation.

Accordingly, from the beginning of my ministry in Healaugh I deliberately set myself to expose the im-

moral lessons frequently found in the Bible; to weaken the authority of the Book as a whole by pointing out its self-contradictions, its crude errors in science, in history, in cosmogony, and, above all, its false and pernicious teachings about the relation between God and man; and all this I could do with the greatest ease by simply letting the Bible speak for itself, and by contrasting the beautiful truths which it contains with its many absurdities and abominations. In doing this, of course dogmas of all degrees of absurdity and of immoral tendency were attacked in and through my attacks upon Scripture. I dealt unsparingly with popular errors as I saw my attentive and growing congregation able to bear it; and it very frequently happened that a sermon of whose reception I had been most in doubt was received by the large majority with the greatest pleasure. In 1864 I published a sermon on the famine in the days of David and on the numbering of the people, entitled, "Is every statement in the Bible about our Heavenly Father strictly true?" This sermon had a rapid sale, and was in the third edition, when a friend of mine, who had paid for the printing of the sermon, got into serious trouble with the Archbishop of York in consequence of his complicity with me. I was in a most difficult position, and to save my friend further annoyance, I agreed to withdraw the sermon from publication. This I announced to the Archbishop in such terms as that it could not be misunderstood as a retraction of my opinions, and instead of promising not to do so again, I pledged myself to follow the same course, and to publish whatever I pleased of precisely the same character as that of the sermon I had withdrawn.

At the close of the following year I began to publish the "*Sling and the Stone*," which was issued in monthly parts, each containing two sermons which had been actually preached in Healaugh Church, and which were generally printed *verbatim* as preached. This

served a two-fold object—(1) to set an example of such handling of the Bible and Dogma, and (2) to show to the world that such teaching was acceptable to the people when properly put before them. Unpretending as the work was, and absolutely free from all meretricious adornments, I knew the work would force its way—as it did—among all ranks in the kingdom, and would be read by clergy and laity—welcomed by some, detested and anathematized by others.

In no sense is it true that *the Sling and Stone* was sent forth on purpose to excite a prosecution. I only published those sermons because I wanted the public at large to benefit by the teaching that was so warmly welcomed in my own country parish, and also because I knew that, whether the reader liked it or not, every sermon that he read would set him thinking for himself. I know of other clergymen who availed themselves of the liberty established by Lord Westbury's judgment, and by the new Act of Subscription. But not for worlds would I play into the hands of the prosecuting party by even hinting at their locality or their works. The heresy hunters will discover them soon enough without my help.

It was first attempted to snuff out *the Sling and Stone* by sheer contempt. Very prudently the clerical papers were afraid of burning their fingers, and so they left it alone. The memorable remark of one bishop in the Convocation of Canterbury, "that it was not worth reading," brought me hundreds of new readers. But as time grew and the work really pushed its way, the English Church Union marked it for its prey. One clergyman, whose friendship I have long valued, whose uprightness and gentleness of heart are still my admiration, wrote a pamphlet about my work, blaming the course which Convocation had taken in their impotent abuse of it, and warning his brethren that it was really powerful and really dangerous. He called at once on the bishops to combine their action against

myself as the greatest scandal the Church of England had ever suffered. He went over to the Church of Rome in consequence of their apathy. A weekly paper was started and lived upon the attacks directed against myself, and against two others whom I shall not name, and which at last put such a pressure on the Archbishop of York, as would have required no small degree of manliness to overcome. When proceedings were undertaken, the poor little paper died a natural death.

The English Church Union and the Church Association, representing the High and Low Church parties, alike offered their aid—£500 each—if the Archbishop would only consent to proceedings being taken. So eager were both parties to drive out their common foe.

The offer of the English Church Union was of course rejected by an Archbishop, who had been most unfairly assailed for his prudent hesitation. That of the Church Association was accepted; but how do you think the money had to be collected? By a special fund raised for the purpose. And to gain this end, the Church Association circulated through thousands of religious homes copious extracts from my sermons. The society forgot that, while some would pay willingly for my prosecution, many would enjoy reading the heretical passages, by which the religious training of previous years would be undone! I have much to be thankful for.

You all know the course of these legal proceedings, which were inaugurated by an act strictly legal, but still a severe stretching of the spirit of the law; an act which only manifested the terror which I had inspired. No one had previously been inhibited during proceedings, on any ground but that of immorality. I have been silenced in my own parish for more than a year and a half, and, but for public sympathy, I should have been heavily fined in putting another

preacher in my pulpit. Now, the long drama is played out, and I must describe to you, as accurately as I can, the fatal blow which Lord Hatherley's judgment has struck against the liberties which we had previously enjoyed.

Before I say one word more, I must disclaim the slightest wish or intention to impugn the authority of the judgment, still less to speak disrespectfully of the Lords of Council, either individually or in their collective official capacity. I have the highest respect for the law of the land, and I still believe that it affords the greatest safeguard to liberty of action and opinion to the clergy; that if, instead of a lay and purely legal tribunal, we were at the mercy of Convocation or a bench of Bishops, or of the contemptible little conclaves like kirk-sessions and chapel deacons and committees, all hope of a fair dealing for heretics would be at an end. The mischief done by this judgment is due solely to the obsolete and decayed Standards of Doctrine by which the clergy are bound, and is not due to any unfairness on the part of my judges. The only doubt as to the result which I actually felt, and which led me to carry on the contest to the last was this. Considering former decisions and recent legislation, considering also the vast and rapid growth of opinions more and more at variance with orthodoxy, because more and more in harmony with science and rational thought, it was quite possible that a compromise might have been effected which should have established by the Court of Appeal that liberty which was already actually enjoyed and exercised among a considerable portion of the clergy. There was no possibility of deciding, before the case was fully heard, how much latitude for the sake of comprehension the church would allow to her teachers. By many it was hoped that this would be an opportunity for the healing of many party strifes by a graceful acknowledgment that a clergyman might teach what he sincerely

believed, so long as he did not in terms logically contradict any statement in the articles; and this you know, it is admitted, I had not done. It was worth trying; and the experiment was recognized by hundreds of all sections in the church, as one which was to settle one way or the other the principles which really do govern the Established Church—whether it was to become so open as to deserve the title and position of a National Church, or to sink back into the attitude of an exclusive sect, no more national, nor deserving of State patronage, than any other sect in the kingdom. The Lords of the Council, however, through personal conviction of their duty as administrators of the law, or through a disinclination to relax the old fetters which Parliament had done all but abolish—but had not actually abolished—fell back on the Thirty-nine Articles in their stringent sense; and with such weapons as these adjudged me guilty of having broken the law. I told their Lordships how easy it would be for them to do so, if they liked, because not a man amongst us all is safe. Those who believe in only one God, and say so, can be condemned for not teaching that there are three Gods. Those who believe in three or only two Gods, dare not say so without the risk of being condemned by the Article which says there is only One. None of the clergy are really safe—none could with justice accuse his brother of having no right to be a clergyman without leaving the church himself. Truly can it be said of every one of the Thirty-nine Articles as legal documents, “Whoso falleth on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder.”

My Lords, in giving judgment, however, exceeded my warmest hopes. All I was afraid of was that they would manage to acquit me on nearly all the charges, and condemn me on one or two charges only, by which I should have felt myself bound to leave the church, and things would have gone on in the same miserable

state of uncertainty as before. Fortunately, for the sake of the cause I have at heart, the judgment has been neither materially qualified nor ambiguous. There were fifteen separate articles of accusation against me—two only were rejected and the rest were *proved*—that is to say, I was found guilty of breaking the law in thirteen different ways. It will therefore be illegal henceforth for a clergyman to teach any doctrine enumerated in the thirteen articles which have been proved against me.

Without quoting them all, which might be tedious, I will mention a few that will be interesting.

A clergyman is now forbidden to say,—

That Christ has not made a sacrifice to reconcile his father to us.

That there is no need of any atonement or sacrifice.

That Christ did not bear the punishment due to our sins.

That mankind are not by nature the children of God's wrath.

That they are not under God's wrath, nor under a curse.

He may not say—

That mankind are not in danger of endless suffering.

That mankind need no atonement or justification.

That salvation is not through justification.

He may not say—

That Jesus Christ is no more very God of very God than we men are.

That the worship of Christ is idolatry, and draws away our highest homage and affection from God to another.

That the idea of incarnation takes its rise in unbelief, and springs out of absolute infidelity.

That the expected return of Christ to judge the world is unreasonable and opposed to the simplicity of the love of God as a Father, and is calculated to overthrow the moral government of God.

That the worship of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is the worship of three gods.
And of the Bible, a clergyman may not say—

That in it are found manifest, palpable, and irreconcilable contradictions, and many places which cannot be expounded but so that they be repugnant to others.

In addition to the above, a clergyman, by saying that any doctrine contained in the Thirty-nine Articles is contrary to the teaching of Christ, or has not the authority of Christ, will be deemed to impugn such Articles.

I do not stop to say how far I am really guilty or innocent of the charges ; I only say, these are the fetters, old and new, which the Lords of the Privy Council have been able to rivet on the clergy, by means of the Thirty-nine Articles. You will have noticed that the infallibility of Scripture is practically affirmed. For if no one is allowed to point out the contradictions in the Bible, it is equivalent to assuming that there are no contradictions in it at all; or, that a clergyman is not at liberty to tell his hearers the truth. You will observe also that by this judgment is affirmed the doctrine of endless suffering, which is the second of the two great strongholds of traditional orthodoxy.

The immediate result is of course a great clapping of hands and waving of handkerchiefs by the orthodox party within and without the church. The orthodox Dissenters, to whom *the dogmas* are dearer even than the principle of dissent, are glad to think that the old church, under whose shade they have dwelt so long in peace, would not be left to the mercy of the thinkers. They who profess to hate state control, are thankful enough for it when it seems to favour their opinions which, to tell the truth, sadly want propping up by legal decisions and temporal penalties for heresy. By and by this clamour will die away, and the voice of intelligent thought will be heard.

In or about 1864, the *Pall Mall Gazette* counted with glee the names of forty clergymen who openly subscribed for Bishop Colenso. In 1871, there are nearer four thousand than forty who to a greater or less degree sympathise with my struggle for religious liberty, and whose principles must lead them on to take up the struggle for themselves. Years ago, I came to the front of this conflict, backed up by only a few; but I retire from the Church of England, leaving behind me thousands who will for the most part be stirred up into greater boldness and activity of aggressive action by my expulsion. They will now work for the abolition of the Thirty-nine Articles, which, with all their mischievous and imbecile confusion of thought and of contradictions, present such a formidable barrier in the way of enlightened opinion, and therefore in the way of true religion and godliness. There is one alternative I know. If the Thirty-nine Articles are not soon decently buried, the Church must be disestablished. It must be reformed or die. While liberty reigned, while the obsolete old Articles were allowed to lie in rusty inactivity, there was a *raison d'être* for the existence of a National Church. If it was the Church of the nation, all religious opinions in the nation must, in fairness, be allowed and represented in it. If not, it had no right to be fostered and cherished by the State; if it be a mere sect, as it now is, not only not professing to seek after truth, but openly and shamelessly refusing to do so, and punishing every one of her clergy who is caught in the act, then it would be a crying shame, and a disgrace to our country, to allow her to retain the noble title and to enjoy the social honours of a National Church.

You surely do not forget that a fettered clergy means a fettered people; that if you first gag the men who would, if allowed, speak out their honest convictions, you manufacture hypocrisy, duplicity, and unvarnished falsehood, and in the end you become corrupted your-

selves by the vices which you have forced upon your teachers. If you want religious liberty, you must make the preachers of religious truths free to utter them. Why, this very Sunday question, in which so many of us here are specially interested, tells us, as plainly as words can speak, that the little liberty we have already gained has been only opposed by those who were slaves at heart, and only promoted and assisted by those who are daringly free. The chief priests and Bishops are under tyranny to their flocks, or to the traditional etiquette of their order, bound hand and foot to go only in the old ruts of habit and sentiment; and so they take revenge in doing their best to enslave others. Their power is slight indeed, compared with what it once was, but what little they now have, they use in stifling inquiry, in bribing or over-awing country editors, in threatening country booksellers, in inquisitorial meddling with schools and schoolmasters, and in toothless maledictions against those who have outgrown their control.

Coincident with the judgment in my case, was another event scarcely less indicative of the struggle to maintain orthodoxy by persecution. The Upper House of Convocation, with the exception of the most learned Bishop on the bench, the Bishop of St David and three others, succeeded in passing a resolution to exclude the Rev. G. Vance Smith, an Unitarian of well-known learning, from the New Testament Company of Biblical Revisionists. This resolution was shelved by the Lower House, in consequence of Dean Stanley's vigour and boldness. But all his courage could not stimulate his fellow-proctors to reject the Bishops' resolution in a straightforward manner, but only by a side wind.

Even straws like this shew which way the wind is blowing. They reveal to us that the dogmatic party is becoming more intensely dogmatic, and that religious liberty in the Church of England is seriously threatened, if not for a time wholly paralysed.

I have only now to let it be known to those who care to know it, what course I have resolved to take. *Theologically*, I shall endeavour to do as I have done hitherto, only with no restraint whatever upon my language ; viz., to proclaim what I believe to be the highest truth about God and man ; to proclaim that, and that alone, until I find still higher truth to replace it ; to teach, or rather to try to persuade, my hearers to believe, as I believe, on purely rational grounds ; to forswear, as I have hitherto done, all authoritative and dogmatic positions, and to lead every one to think for himself.

Politically, I shall still strive, as before, to promote religious liberty, aiming to secure that end, first, for the Church established in this realm, by this abolition of dogmatic standards of belief. Though I have little hope of seeing this accomplished, there are very strong grounds to go upon. It will be astonishing to find how much of dogma the clergy will give up when they see that there is no alternative but disestablishment. The day of disestablishment will be, for them, the day of their social transfer from a higher to a lower level. Officially, they will then be on a level with every other sect in the kingdom. To preserve their social priority, depend upon it, vast sacrifices of what they drolly call the "Truth" and "Essentials of Christianity," will be inevitably, though reluctantly, made. I do not intend to do anything to frustrate or impede the work of those liberals whom I have left behind me in the church. I, for one, will give them time, and any humble service within my reach, to promote so good a cause, to try so important an experiment. If it should fail, after all ! Well, then we shall all know what to do and what to expect.

I have such a perfect horror of being again tied down to any set of dogmas or to the unwritten obligations which inevitably attach themselves to membership with any society, that, for the present at all

events, I shall keep myself officially detached from all corporate sects, though I trust this will never be a bar to my most friendly and genial intercourse and interchange of pulpits with men of all denominations, who may desire it. On this point let there be no misunderstanding. I may preach in any pulpit which may be offered me, but I do not mean to identify myself with any sect or denomination, or to set up a new one. If I succeed in opening a church in London or elsewhere, I shall call it after my own name. My hope is to conduct a weekly service somewhere in London, in which the devotional part will be constructed for the expression of religious feeling in prayer and praise, but stripped of every thing like superstition or idolatry ; a service made agreeable by music ; not too long, nor too rigid, the principle being insisted on from the very first, that the form shall be altered or supplanted by other forms to suit the taste of the congregation, and always to leave an open door for improvement.

In the pulpit I shall only claim that liberty which I willingly accede to others, and without which the expression of one's sincere convictions is impossible. Whether or not my plan will succeed, whether or not I may be joined in it by others who have already renounced, or may yet be driven from, their positions as clergymen, remains to be proved. There are too many people, however, in this vast city, as well as scattered all over the land, who deeply and truly sympathise with my aims, for me not to feel great hopes of success. For anything we know, my expulsion from the church now may be the very means of leading to the speedy abolition of the Thirty-nine Articles, and to the subsequent reconstruction of our public worship, which, of course, would have soon to follow, and for which my new liturgy might afford a not unworthy suggestion.

I cannot leave you to-night without giving utterance to one of my deepest convictions. We cannot get a

religious liberty worthy of the name, unless we have first learned to give it. Let every opinion, every view have fair play—*i.e.*, a fair hearing, and let it be tested only by reason and facts. It is vain to call ourselves Freethinkers or lovers of liberty, when we are upbraiding each other with going too far, or not going far enough. Every one is under obligation to be true to himself first—to say earnestly what his convictions are at the time he is speaking; and while all are growing onwards in wisdom and knowledge as best they can, it is ungracious, it is cruel to taunt one with growing too rapidly and another with not growing as fast as ourselves. What we have to fight against is Falsehood of every degree and in every form. The weapon we have to fight with is Reason. Let us be not only dashing but indomitable, not only brave as heroes, but calm as only the strong know how to be. It seems like a bathos to refer to the benefits which we may gain by devotion to Truth only, as if Truth was not the highest possible object of human attainment. But it is nevertheless certain that everything is giving birth to fresh results, and one cannot even be a worshipper and seeker after Truth without reaping spoils on our way, for which we never looked. If we love Truth for its own sake, because it is, as it were, the voice of Him who cannot lie, we shall be raised by that love of ours into love of goodness, and Truth will not only illumine our intellectual life, but will purify and refine our whole being, and fill us ever and ever with higher and nobler aspiration. I will now close with a few lines of an unknown author:—

“ Of all the pillars fair
Holding the world in air,
Canst thou one shaft espy
Based on a crafty lie ?
Is but one column there
A sham, an empty shell ?

C

Not one? Then hew away,
All good right arms that may.
No falsehood we can fell
Holds up God's citadel.
For every cheat that falls
The firmer stand the walls.
For all that's cleared away
Of rubbish and decay,
The sounder stand and shine
The square-hewn laws divine.

Dear spirit, far or near,
Let this new-risen year
Be a new-birth to thee;
Stand forth—be wholly free.
Count not what it shall cost
Giv'n for the world—not lost?"



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